



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

South Florida Ecological Services Office

Vero Beach, Florida

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Service Approves Largest Habitat Conservation Plan to Protect Threatened and Endangered Species in the Florida Keys

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) it approved to bolster ongoing conservation for the federally listed Key deer, the Lower Keys marsh rabbit, and the eastern indigo snake on Big Pine Key and No Name Keys in Monroe County, Florida.

After nearly a decade of planning, this cooperative effort between the citizens of Big Pine and No Name Keys, Monroe County, the Florida Department of Community Affairs, and the Florida Department of Transportation has resulted in the largest Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) ever created in Florida.

"This partnership agreement marks the culmination of years of hard work and the tireless commitment of many people," said Sam Hamilton, the Service's southeast regional director. "It will ensure that Big Pine and No Name Keys, which support the core of the Key deer population, will continue to have the habitat needed to sustain this important species."

Covering an area of approximately 7,000 acres, the Big Pine Key/No Name Key HCP is a conservation strategy that protects the habitat of the endangered Key deer (*Odocoileus virginianus clavium*), endangered Lower Keys marsh rabbit (*Sylvilagus palustris hefneri*), and threatened eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon corais couperi*) while allowing limited residential, commercial, recreational, and municipal development on Big Pine and No Name Keys. In addition to protecting high quality habitat for endangered species, the HCP directs development toward areas that have been already impacted and away from endangered species habitat.

The HCP will result in the acquisition and restoration of more than 500 acres of high quality habitat to maintain the Key deer population and benefit the eastern indigo snake. In addition, development will be excluded from endangered Lower Keys marsh rabbit habitat and a public education program will be implemented to address threats posed by free-roaming pets.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

You can find out more information on the species at:

- Key Deer <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/vbpdfs/species/mammals/kede.pdf>
- Lower Keys Marsh Rabbit <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/vbpdfs/species/mammals/lkmr.pdf>
- Eastern Indigo Snake <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/vbpdfs/species/reptiles/eisn.pdf>

For more information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, visit our home page at: <http://southeast.fws.gov/> or <http://www.fws.gov/>.

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